

AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH PIERRE SALINGER

OCTOBER 25, 1962

5:05 PM     EDT

THURSDAY

MR. SALINGER: I am available for questions.

Q. Pierre, in view of the President's letter to U Thant, are we going to continue the quarantine while these discussions go on?

MR. SALINGER: Let me go on BACKGROUND

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and say that it is evident, self-evident, that the quarantine will continue. There are still Soviet ships headed towards Cuba, and the only way that this Government can get precise information on some of these ships as to what cargoes they are carrying --

Q. Slow down.

MR. SALINGER: -- is through the quarantine.

Q. Do you have the number of ships?

MR. SALINGER: No, I would not give you the number. I might also add that as the President said in his speech, and it was stated in his message to the Secretary General, the objective of the quarantine -- Hold on just a minute.

As I was saying --

Q. Pierre, is everything you are saying for BACKGROUND?

MR. SALINGER: BACKGROUND, yes.

Q. Background as yesterday, a White House official?

MR. SALINGER: A White House official.

As I stated, the objective, the principal objective, of the quarantine is stated both in the President's speech and in his message to U Thant, the elimination of the offensive missile bases from Cuba, and work is continuing on these bases.

Q. As of when?

MR. SALINGER: No.

Q. What form is that work taking?

continuation of the quarantine, whether that means indefinitely or until talks begin.

MR. SALINGER: I have stated two matters which are compelling matters as far as the quarantine. One of them is the continuation of Soviet ships towards the area, and the second is the fact that the purpose of the quarantine is to eliminate the offensive missile bases in Cuba and the work on those bases continues.

Q. Pierre, it is a little difficult to understand how a quarantine, by itself, could remove any missile bases. They are there.

MR. SALINGER: Well, I think on that I would certainly refer you back to the President's speech because he was very precise on this point.

Q. I would like to go back to the President's speech, Pierre. The President said in his speech, in substance, that if these measures were not enough, further steps would be taken. That was roughly what he said.

MR. SALINGER: All I can do is what I did with Bill, that the President's speech speaks for itself on this matter.

Q. Pierre, you said the quarantine will continue. Does that mean that the United States will not engage in any talks that would involve ending the quarantine while the talks are underway?

MR. SALINGER: I think my statement speaks for itself.

Q. Short of invasion, what precautions have we taken because of the new threat of these bases in Cuba?

MR. SALINGER: Again, I am not going to go beyond what the President said and what I have just said.

Q. Is this not a rejection of Mr. U Thant's proposal, to say that the quarantine will continue?

MR. SALINGER: I think the message of the President to Mr. U Thant is very clear. I was asked about that particular point of the quarantine since there seems to be some doubt in some people's minds as to whether the quarantine was going to continue.

Q. What are the preliminary talks he is agreeing to? What will they be about?

MR. SALINGER: I would prefer you get that from the U.N.

Q. In your BACKGROUND --

MR. SALINGER: All remarks I made on this subject are BACKGROUND.

Q. -- there is a clear indication that the quarantine will go on until the missile bases are dismantled, which goes much further than merely the shipment of missiles into Cuba. Is that a correct interpretation?

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MR. SALINGER: No.

Q. What form is that work taking?

MR. SALINGER: I don't want to spell that out, Eddie.

Q. When you say it is self-evident the quarantine will continue, in terms of time do you mean indefinitely?

Q. We can't hear you.

Q. I was asking in terms of time what was meant by

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Q. -- there is a clear indication that the quarantine will go on until the missile bases are dismantled, which goes much further than merely the shipment of missiles into Cuba. Is that a correct interpretation?

MR. SALINGER: I would think I was rather precise, Ralph. I said there were two matters involved here. One is the continuation towards Cuba of Soviet ships. The other is the fact that these bases are still there and that the work on them continues.

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Q. I am trying to relate this phrase of "will continue" to these two facts.

MR. SALINGER: I think I will just let the statement stand.

Q. Pierre, if the ships turned around and we were satisfied that the blocked ships were sailing away from Cuba rather than towards it, is it correct to infer from what you said that that, in itself, would not be enough, would not be a condition under which we would lift the quarantine?

MR. SALINGER: I am not in a position to comment on contingencies. I have stated the present situation.

Q. Mr. Secretary, when you say work is continuing on these bases, you mean construction work, not dismantling?

MR. SALINGER: I do not mean dismantling.

Q. Pierre, can you be more precise about continuing now? Is this as of photos we have gotten today?

MR. SALINGER: I am not going to be more precise on that.

Q. Pierre, you said that ships were headed towards Cuba. Can you state whether they are coming near the area of the blockade, or are they just in mid-Atlantic heading toward it?

MR. SALINGER: I am not going to spell that out.

Q. Do you mean that work is continuing on these missile bases?

MR. SALINGER: That is exactly what I said.

Q. What steps are we going to take to stop the continued build-up of the bases?

MR. SALINGER: I thought the President's speech was very precise. I am not going to go beyond it.

Q. Pierre, since the quarantine, so-called, in itself doesn't rid Cuba of the bases, would further steps be needed, as the President stated in his Monday night speech?

MR. SALINGER: Eddie, I think we are going to have to let the situation develop, and I think the President's speech will have to serve as the backdrop of that.

Q. If we let it develop, that implies that there is not too much of a danger in those bases right now. We were told on Monday night that some of these bases were assumed to be operational.

MR. SALINGER: I am not going to go beyond what I said, Earl.

Q. What is the reading, Pierre, that you might possibly put on the fact that the captain of this tanker

that we would insist that the UN people be in Cuba and that they would see these things dismantled? Was that the President's speech?

MR. SALINGER: The President's speech contained that reference, and the subsequent speech of Mr. Stevenson as well as our draft resolution contains that provision.

Q. Pierre, you say the quarantine will continue. Do you mean indefinitely?

MR. SALINGER: I have answered that question three times already.

Q. Pierre, the Secretary General in his request to the President suggested a two to three week suspension of the quarantine, but the President's reply to the Secretary General doesn't reply to that point. Can you say whether the President plans a further reply or why he hasn't answered that specific point?

MR. SALINGER: I can't tell you whether he will reply further, and I am going to stand on what I said.

Q. Pierre, have we set any kind of deadling for them to begin dismantling the bases?

MR. SALINGER: I can't answer that.

Q. Would you care to comment on Senator Kuchel's statement today?

MR. SALINGER: No.

Q. Was the tanker the only ship which has so far reached the point at which ships are being intercepted, or have others reached that point since the tanker?

MR. SALINGER: As of now it is the only ship.

Q. Pierre, is the pace of the work continuing as rapidly as that described by the President Monday evening?

MR. SALINGER: Again I would rather not spell that out. The work is continuing.

Q. Has Bertram Russell's telegram been found?

MR. SALINGER: No.

Q. Do you mean it is continuing or has it resumed? Was there a break-off?

MR. SALINGER: I am not aware of a break-off.

Q. Have other ships altered their course, do you know?

MR. SALINGER: I can't comment on that.

Q. Up to now there has not been a certainty that there are nuclear warheads in Cuba. Has that situation changed?

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MR. SALINGER: I am not going to go beyond what I said, Earl.

Q. What is the reading, Pierre, that you might possibly put on the fact that the captain of this tanker which readily identified itself and its cargo and its destination -- does this indicate that they received instructions?

MR. SALINGER: I am not possibly in a position to comment on that.

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MR. SALINGER: I cannot comment on that.

Q. Can you tell us anything about a communication between Khrushchev and the President?

MR. SALINGER: My answer on that is the same as this

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morning.

Q. Ambassador Stevenson repeatedly used the word nuclearization all the way through.

MR. SALINGER: I said I am not in a position to comment.

Q. Has Adlai begun his discussions with U Thant?

MR. SALINGER: I am not in a position to comment on that.

Q. Has the President received a reply from U Thant?

MR. SALINGER: I don't think he has received the text on it yet.

Q. Are you expecting anything further from here in the next couple of hours?

MR. SALINGER: One never knows.

Q. Can you put this out as not BACKGROUND? Has all of this been BACKGROUND?

MR. SALINGER: It has all been BACKGROUND, that is right.

I understand there are some who came into this briefing late. I want to make sure that they understand that we have been talking completely for BACKGROUND and anything I said is attributable only to White House sources.

Q. Can you give us guidance for the next few hours?

MR. SALINGER: I can't. Stay loose.

Q. This takes the place of the 5:30?

MR. SALINGER: This is the 5:30 briefing.

Q. For background, what are some of the literary devices? Can you say a White House official or officials? Is that satisfactory to you?

MR. SALINGER: That is fine, yes.

Q. Can you say why you resorted to this device in the last two or three days? We never had it before.

MR. SALINGER: We have had it almost steadily.

Q. But "background", Pierre, but not background through a White House Official.

MR. SALINGER: Yes, we have had it numerous times, Ned.

Q. Thank you, Mr. Secretary.

Q. Pierre, to say we attribute it to a White House official, can we use quotes on these words?

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MR. SALINGER: Yes, you can quote.

Q. Any new message from Premier Khrushchev?

MR. SALINGER: I answered that question.

Q. Have you any appointments for tomorrow?

MR. SALINGER: No.

THE PRESS: Thank you.

END